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IFAS EXTENSION

Friday's Feature

By

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Tips for great container gardens

Gardening in large containers is one of the hottest gardening trends today. Mixed plantings in large pots or other creative containers are often used as focal points at building entrances and on decks and patios.

Dr. Gary Knox, Professor of Environmental Horticulture, provides the following tips for effective design and use of large container gardens.

- Container gardens have traditionally contained a mix of annual plants and herbaceous perennials for a burst of concentrated color. But don't hold back. Current trends combine various annuals and perennials with tropical plants and even woody plants.
- Think big! For greatest impact, the container needs size, color or dramatic shape. This not only makes a big impression but the larger the pot, the easier it is to care for.
- Use "hot" color combinations of foliage and flowers to draw the eye and add interest. Some color combinations that are especially eye-catching are burgundy/purple-leaved plants with silver, yellow or lime green-leaved plants, yellow and red flowers and yellow and orange flowers.
- Certain combinations of plants create eye-pleasing container gardens. Use an evergreen plant in the center of a pot as an "anchor" around which colorful annuals and perennials can be planted. The evergreen provides a "background" against which the annuals and perennials display their color. The evergreen plant forms the permanent plant in the container, while the annuals and perennials are changed seasonally or as needed to keep the plant composition looking "fresh".
- Another sure-fire arrangement is to use the trio of a mounding plant, an upright plant, and a trailing or weeping plant. The mounding plant forms the overall mass of the planting while the upright plant catches the eye and the trailing or weeping plant softens the container edge and adds interest.
- For a classic look, use a single plant as a specimen that highlights that plant and creates an air of simple elegance. Choices for the single specimen plant might be a century plant agave, Chinese fan palm, sago palm, ornamental banana, black bamboo or miscanthus ornamental grass.
- Large-leaved plants like elephant ears, bananas and other "tropicals" add zing to containers because of their coarse-textures and odd shapes.
- Don't stop with just one container! Groupings of containers create impressive displays of foliage, flowers and containers. However, don't use a hodge-podge of containers and plants. Be sure to unify the

grouping by using the same-shaped container in different sizes, the same type of container, the same dominant plant form in all containers or the same accent color in all containers.

- Take advantage of the portability containers allow. Re-arrange containers regularly to create fresh groupings. Moving containers also allows you to change locations with the seasons, relocating sun-loving container plants to sunnier areas as the days shorten, or moving containers with tender plants to protected corners during cold weather.
- Some great container plants for drama and durability are succulents (such as agave and yucca), palms, cycads, ornamental grasses, bamboo, cordyline, dracaena, and agapanthus.

So even though the weather has cooled, we can still have color in our landscapes. Create a festive fall color display using cool season plants and enjoy a bright spot all season long.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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